

Masthead Logo

Archives Alive

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Richard Hayashi: A Devoted Friend

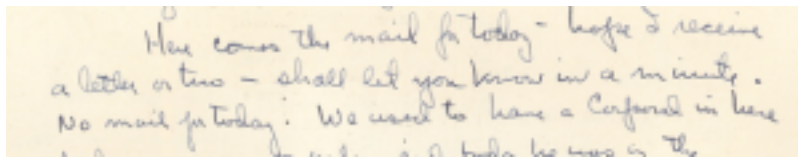
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Jim Just Wants Some Mail

Reading Jim Eaton's letter to Evelyn, I didn't get the sense that they were particularly close. Jim doesn't seem to have too much to say to Evelyn other than to describe his situation, and addresses her somewhat formally, at least compared to some of the other letters in the collection. My suspicion is that Jim is writing in hopes of getting more mail back. One can imagine that letters from home, whether from particularly close friends or not, meant a great deal to soldiers training far away from home like Jim.



In light of this potential aim, Jim writes a pretty

rationally convincing letter. He begins “in-scene,” if you will, describing to Evelyn the play-by-play of his Sunday morning. He talks about church services enough that I would guess that he knew Evelyn in some context relating to church. He seems to be conveniently writing just as the mail is coming in for that day (apparently the Military Postal Service operates on Sundays), and Jim's in-the-moment narration conveys his disappointment more casually than a normal, past tense letter might. It would seem much more peculiar for Jim to talk about the mail if he was merely mentioning the fact that he'd received nothing that day, whereas this in-the-moment narration allows him to slip in the disappointing lack of mail much more casually.

Jim also mentions that Sundays make him think of “back home,” another clue that his main aim in writing to Evelyn might be homesickness.

Jim goes on to mention programs he's receiving from something called the “University of Life” and how he hopes they continue to

come. Whether or not Evelyn is responsible for him getting these programs, this is another way Jim makes clear that he really likes getting mail and more letters would be appreciated. He also mentions the chapel there for a third time. The fact that this letter is mostly about the mail and church supports my suspicion that Jim and Evelyn don't know one another very well, and church might be the only thing they have in common. The style of writing in the letter is reminiscent of the sort of conversation I might have with an acquaintance from class- all you can really talk about is that one thing you have in common or yourself.

Jim finishes his letter with his only outright request for a letter. Saying that he "shall enjoy hearing from you" seems like a bit of an understatement in light of the rhetoric in the rest of the letter. At this point, I'm ready to send Jim some mail myself.

Upon further research of the historical context of the letter, I found out that for some time before 1946, Evelyn Corrie, the recipient of this letter, was working as the director of youth activities for the First Methodist Church of Chicago, also called the Chicago Temple. Before that, she worked as a religious educator in Waterloo, Iowa. This is probably the reason Jim Eaton mentioned that "things are really getting underway in the Sunday School" when he's writing his letter. This makes me think that Jim probably knew Evelyn through church in some way. Evelyn is also the daughter of a Methodist minister in Iowa, so Jim may have known her in that capacity as well, if not through Waterloo. Both possibilities would explain the extent to which church is discussed in Jim's letter. Either way, Jim must have known that she was working in Sunday School, whether she was in Waterloo or Chicago at the time. Jim's reference to Iowa time suggests she was still in Waterloo, though she did move to Chicago later that year.

According to the letterhead, Jim was at Fort Jackson in South Carolina, a training station in World War II. Jim mentions Camp Dodge in Iowa as well. Camp Dodge was an inactive military



base for the period between world wars, and was reactivated in World War II solely as an induction center, processing new soldiers for examinations, tests, and outfitting before shipping them off to actual training stations, which could have been anywhere in the nation. Jim ended up in Fort Jackson, which, according to his letter, was a popular destination for men coming through Camp Dodge.

Jim also mentions something about the 1st Convalescent Hospital, which is where I begin to question Jim's familiarity with facts. There were no convalescent hospitals in either Iowa or South Carolina, contrary to what Jim's letter seems to suggest. Perhaps Jim is referring to the station hospital that was located in Fort Jackson. It's also possible that Jim is just noting an unrelated coincidence regarding the 1st Convalescent Hospital, but in light of the context, I think Jim was probably mistaken and meant to refer to the station hospital.

Jim also mentions interest in something he calls the "University of Life." This is another instance where I question Jim. Even with the assistance of esteemed librarian Kelly McElroy, I couldn't find any record of anything called the University of Life that existed in 1943. I did discover that "the University of Life" is a saying in New Zealand, meaning something akin to "learned through experience." It seems unlikely that Jim would have picked up this phrase anywhere between Iowa and South Carolina, and what sort of programs he would be referring to regarding it, so I doubt that's

how Jim's using the phrase, but I'm at a loss as to what else he could mean.

In many instances, the historical context of this letter asked more questions than it answered, but was interesting nonetheless. If only I could ask Jim to explain himself.

Written By: Mary Caitmilliff

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